

84%

of professors and

65% of teachers

say that high-school graduates are unprepared or only somewhat prepared for college.

6%

of professors and

36%

of teachers say students are very well prepared in writing.

65%

of professors and

66%

of teachers say students don't do enough homework.

4%

of professors and

37%

of teachers

say students are very well prepared in math.

2 companion 'Chronicle' surveys show that college professors are much more concerned than school teachers are about the writing abilities of freshmen

A Perception Gap Over Students' Preparation

By ALVIN P. SANOFF

ASK COLLEGE FACULTY MEMBERS about the high-school graduates coming into their classes: Many will tell you that students are ill prepared for the demands of higher education. Ask public-high-school teachers the same question: While they acknowledge student shortcomings, their answers will be more positive.

That's what *The Chronicle* found in companion national surveys, one of college faculty members and one of high-school teachers. In particular, professors and teachers differ significantly in their assessments of students' writing ability. Forty-four percent of faculty members say students are not well prepared for college-level writing, a view held by only 10 percent of teachers. Just 6 percent of professors view students as very well-prepared writers, compared with 36 percent of teachers who see them that way.

There is also a large gap in views of mathematics readiness. Thirty-two percent of faculty members say students are not well prepared in math, a judgment shared by 9 percent of teachers. Conversely, 37 percent of teachers say students are very well prepared in math, compared with only 4 percent of faculty members.

The surveys, designed to compare the views of college faculty members with those of high-school teachers, were conducted for *The Chronicle* by Maguire Associates, a Boston-area research and consulting company that also analyzed the results. The findings are likely to add fuel to a growing debate over whether students graduate from secondary schools prepared for the rigors of college.

Asked about students' overall preparation for college, 84 percent of faculty members—compared with 65 percent of teachers—say that high-school graduates are either unprepared or are only somewhat well prepared to pursue a college degree. Almost one-fourth of faculty members say flatly that students are not prepared. Just 12 percent of teachers agree with that assessment.

Conversely, more than twice the proportion of teachers as compared with faculty members—36 versus 15 percent—say that students are either very or extremely well prepared. Teachers at schools where the proportion of low-income students is 10 percent or below are most likely to hold a positive view.

When asked about students' abilities and attitudes in several specific areas, faculty members say that students are inadequate writers, have trouble understanding difficult materials, fall short in knowledge of science and math, have poor study habits, and lack motivation. A professor in the social sciences at a public university in Louisiana who responded to the survey complains that "students don't know how to study, how to organize and retain the information, or how to apply it."

Many of the faculty members who are particularly troubled by shortcomings in writing volunteered comments about their concerns. Typical is an English professor at a public university in Pennsylvania: "In composition, students are usually unaware of what it takes to write even a four- to five-page essay every two or three weeks. One reason is that they are not asked to write in quantity for high-school English classes."

A social-science professor at a public university in California says that there is a need for "writing, writing, and more writing. Written preparation, at least in my school, is the weakest link."

Indeed, professors are much more likely than their high-school counterparts to require a significant amount of writing in their classes. More than 70 percent expect students to at least occasionally write papers of more than five pages. That is true of just 39 percent of high-school teachers. Sixty-one percent of teachers never ask students to write papers of more than five pages. That is true of only 28 percent of faculty members.

Particularly large gaps were apparent in assignments in English and in the social sciences and history. Fifty-

four percent of high-school teachers in the social sciences and history never require papers of more than five pages, as compared with just 13 percent of faculty members in those academic areas. Twenty-five percent of English teachers never assign longer papers, as compared with just 6 percent of their college counterparts.

A much smaller gap appears when it comes to shorter writing assignments. More than 80 percent of both college and high-school instructors require papers of one to five pages from time to time, and 40 percent of faculty members and 33 percent of teachers assign short papers at least a few times a month.

Unlike faculty members, teachers feel that students are fairly well prepared in writing, science, and math. But they agree with faculty criticism of students' study habits and motivation. "I see more and more students who expect a high grade for a minimal amount of work," says an English teacher in Ohio. And a number of teachers fault parents. A science teacher in Colorado complains that "parents require too little and do not supervise study habits."

IN THE ARENA of college admissions, which is fraught with stories of students facing steeper and steeper competition at the most selective institutions, half the faculty members say their institutions have, in fact, become more selective in admissions. (Faculty members at nonsectarian private institutions are the most likely to hold that view.)

Despite that, many faculty members feel that today's students are not as well prepared as their counterparts of 10 years ago. An English professor at a public university in Ohio says that "when I give reading quizzes, they frequently complain that the questions are too difficult. Several years ago, students were more likely to say that the quizzes were too easy."

The observations of an engineering professor at a public institution in North Carolina might explain the

Continued on Page 14

“Students need to read more, but more importantly, they need to come from homes where reading is the norm.”
—An English teacher in Florida

“I teach composition, and many of my students do not understand the very basics of formulating an argument—for example, you must support a claim with evidence. High-school teachers need to emphasize writing skills and critical-thinking skills. Colleges should organize seminars for high-school teachers to help them understand an institution's expectations of first-year students.”
—An English professor at a public university in Georgia

“Students are hurt by a watered-down level of course placement. Guidance counselors recommend students for honors and AP courses who are not necessarily honors/AP students. The school administration then puts pressure on teachers to have an acceptable grade average in the class, forcing teachers to ‘dumb’ down the material. Therefore, honors courses are no longer really honors courses, and AP courses are no longer AP courses.”

—A social-studies teacher in Connecticut

How The Chronicle's Surveys Were Conducted

IN COMPANION SURVEYS, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* sought responses from a nationwide sample of public-high-school teachers in core academic subjects and from faculty members in a variety of academic disciplines at public and private colleges and universities that offer a four-year degree and have a comprehensive academic program.

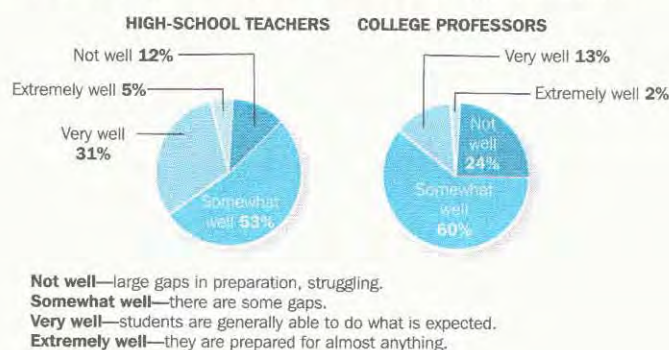
Maguire Associates, of Bedford, Mass., a higher-education market-research and consulting company, conducted the surveys.

To identify potential survey recipients, the company used nationwide databases of high-school teachers and of college faculty members compiled by Market Data Retrieval, of Shelton, Conn. Samples of 9,000 teachers and 7,000 faculty members were randomly selected from the databases, and they received a letter and in some cases also an e-mail message inviting recipients to take part in the survey, which was conducted online in January.

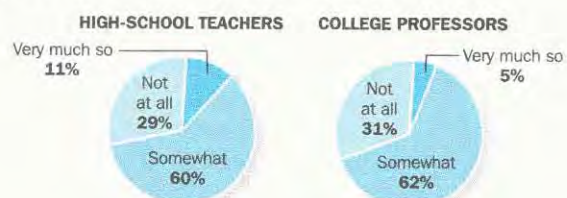
The survey was designed to ascertain the views of faculty members and teachers on student readiness for college as well as on a variety of other issues, including the impact of high-stakes testing. A total of 746 high-school teachers and 1,098 college faculty members took part in the survey. The response rates were 8.3 percent and 15.7 percent respectively, which are considered good for a survey of this type. The demographics of the respondents were consistent with those of the total samples, so there was no need to weight the responses. Figures may not add to 100 percent because of rounding or because of the omission of the category “no response.”

VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND PROFESSORS ON STUDENTS' PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE

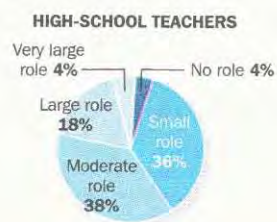
How well prepared are your students for college-level work?



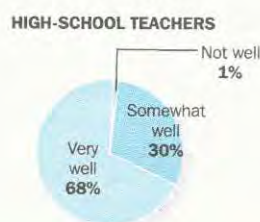
Are colleges generally successful in making their academic expectations clear to high-school teachers?



How great a role do parents of most of your students play in helping your students be prepared for college?



How well do you personally understand the level of preparation that is required for your students to succeed in college?



Students' preparation for college-level demands

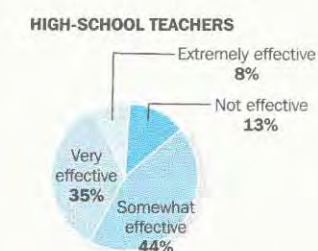
	Not well prepared	Somewhat well prepared	Very well prepared	Don't know	
Oral communication	14%	55%	26%	5%	High school
	18	64	15	3	College
Science	8	44	38	11	High school
	20	32	5	42	College
Mathematics	9	46	37	7	High school
	32	32	4	32	College
Writing	10	49	36	4	High school
	44	47	6	3	College
Reading/understanding difficult materials	15	56	26	3	High school
	41	48	10	2	College
Study habits (organization, planning)	30	53	15	2	High school
	41	50	7	2	College
Motivation to work hard	27	54	17	2	High school
	29	50	20	1	College
Ability to seek and use support resources	19	54	23	4	High school
	26	55	12	6	College
Research skills	18	53	26	3	High school
	49	42	4	6	College

How effective are guidance counselors in your school at doing the following?

Providing appropriate advice on courses and preparation for college

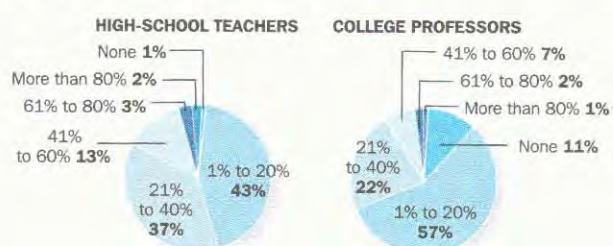


Providing good advice concerning college options



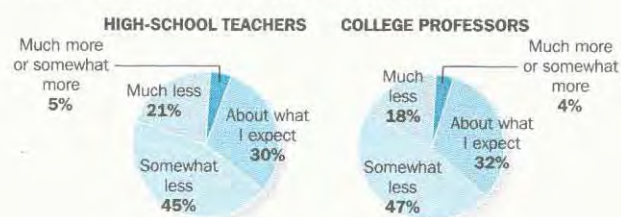
COMPARISON OF EXPECTATIONS AND ACTUAL STUDENT EFFORT

Percentage of class time spent reviewing materials and skills that should have been learned earlier*



* Earlier grade for high-school teachers; in high school for college faculty members.

What students do as compared with expectations



Continued on Page 12

“One thing I have noticed over the years is the decrease in students’ ability to take notes during class. This is a big thing that high-school teachers could help students with before they arrive on the university campus.”

—A business professor at a public university in Virginia

“Students and parents are more concerned with a student’s GPA than taking challenging courses. . . . Many students are too busy working to pay for cars, cell-phones, and rent to study and make their education their ‘job.’ Finally, not all students want or are able to go on to college. Trying to teach college prep to all students is doing a disservice to those who want and need vocational training, and secondly, students wanting college prep are often held back and slowed down.”

—A mathematics teacher in West Virginia

“The core curriculum—basic math, English, physical and natural sciences, and general liberal arts—should be taught at the high-school level. The colleges should teach degree-specific course work only, similar to Europe. We spend too much time teaching students basic skills that I learned before the eighth grade.”

—A science professor at a private university in New York

IMPACT OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ON HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM PRACTICES

How much has testing related to the No Child Left Behind Act or other state or district high-stakes testing programs affected your teaching?

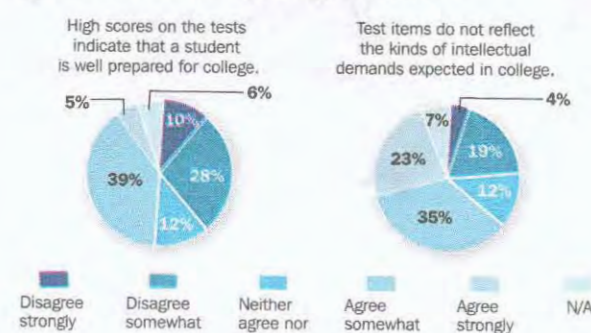
	Never	Sometimes	Often	N/A
I am helped by having clearly specified learning goals for students.	10%	42%	40%	9%
I have to cut out some of the more creative elements of my teaching.	14	37	41	7
I teach to the test.	18	44	29	9
I have to dumb down the material in order to concentrate on basics.	23	50	19	8
I must teach students material that is too difficult for them.	34	44	14	8

Thinking about a typical class, approximately how many hours in a school year do you spend directly preparing students in that class for high-stakes tests?

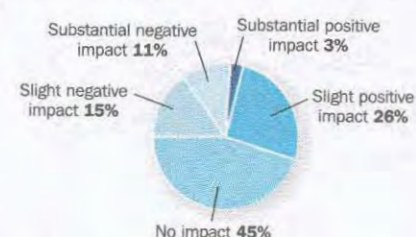


* My students don't take high-stakes tests.

Agreement or disagreement with statements concerning high-stakes tests that apply to your students



College faculty members’ views on the impact of outcomes testing on student preparedness*

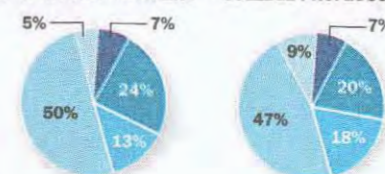


* Responses only of those saying their institutions drew most heavily from states that required such testing

Views of the SAT/ACT and Advanced Placement tests

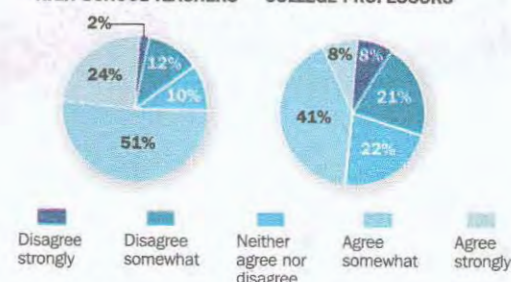
SAT or ACT scores are good indicators of the preparedness of students for the academic demands of college.

HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS COLLEGE PROFESSORS



Students who pass Advanced Placement tests have already indicated that they can do college-level work.

HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS COLLEGE PROFESSORS



ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS IN A TYPICAL CLASS

Never Less than once a month A few times a month Weekly or more often

Write a 1- to 5-page paper

High school	19%	48%	24%	9%
College	16	44	32	8

Write a paper of more than 5 pages

High school	61%	37%	2%	0%
College	28	67	5	0

Analyze basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory

High school	2%	12%	30%	56%
College	2	10	26	63

Make a presentation in class

High school	11%	59%	24%	6%
College	21	62	14	3

Participate in class discussion

High school	1%	4%	9%	86%
College	7	6	17	71

Work with other students on projects

High school	4%	29%	36%	31%
College	20	36	26	18

Never Less than once a month A few times a month Weekly or more often

Memorize facts, ideas, or methods

High school	5%	18%	28%	50%
College	12	23	23	42

Work on a paper or project that requires integrating ideas or information from various sources

High school	12%	52%	26%	10%
College	12	54	24	10

Make judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods

High school	2%	18%	31%	49%
College	3	14	30	53

Apply theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

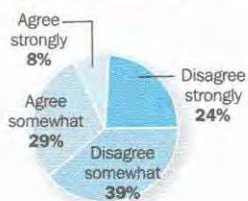
High school	1%	11%	33%	55%
College	2	14	30	54

Continued on Page 14

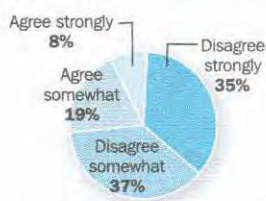
FACULTY MEMBERS' VIEWS ON HIGH SCHOOLS AND THEIR OWN INSTITUTION

Students' preparation for college

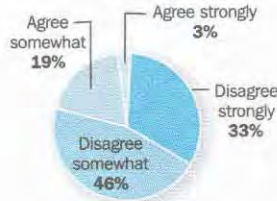
Most of the students I teach lack the basic skills for college-level work.



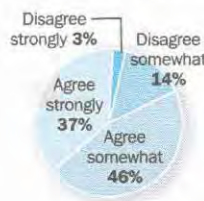
This institution should not offer remedial/developmental education.



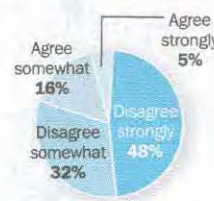
Faculty members feel that most students are well prepared academically.



Faculty members here are strongly interested in the academic problems of undergraduates.

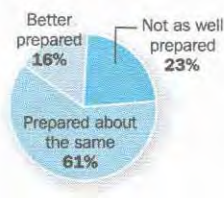


Promoting diversity leads to the admission of too many underprepared students.

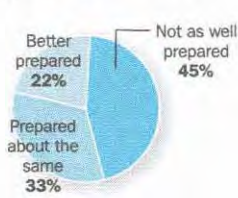


How academically well prepared are students at your institution now in comparison to the past?

Compared to five years ago students are:

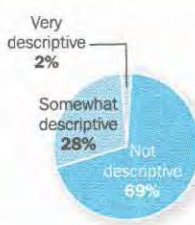


Compared to 10 years ago students are:

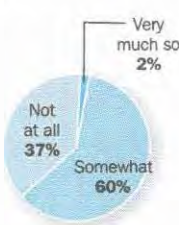


Note: Responses cover only those who were teaching five or 10 years ago.

How descriptive of your institution is the following statement: "Faculty members are rewarded for their efforts to work with underprepared students."

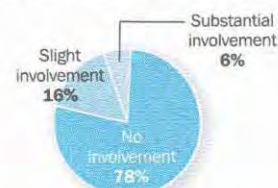


Do you believe that public secondary schools are adequately conveying to their students what colleges will expect of them academically?

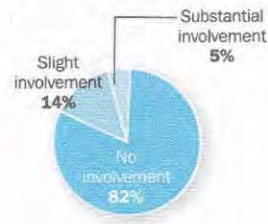


Within the last five years, what involvement, if any, have you had with the following types of programs?

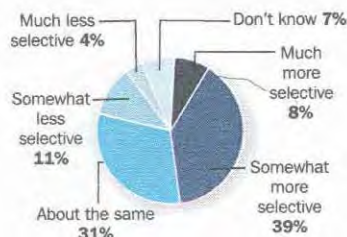
Programs to work with high-school teachers to increase their effectiveness in preparing students for college



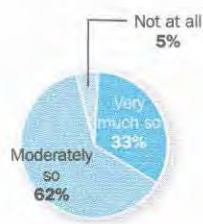
Programs designed to help high-school students themselves become better prepared for college



Over the last five years, with respect to undergraduate admissions, would you say that your institution has gotten more selective, less selective, or stayed about the same?

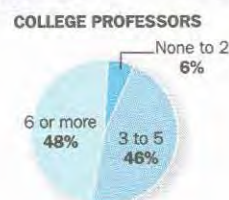
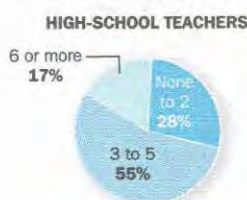


Does your institution have adequate resources to support students who need extra academic help?



EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS' HOMEWORK

Hours of work outside of class expected of students per week



Continued From Page 9

seeming contradiction between higher admission standards and lesser student preparation. She says her students fall into two distinct groups: "eager, well prepared, and hardworking, and clueless with terrible study habits and low motivation. The gap between the two groups is growing."

Comparison of the two *Chronicle* surveys also reveals:

■ **When it comes to homework**, 65 percent of faculty members and 66 percent of teachers say students do less than they would like them to do. Forty-eight percent of faculty members—compared with 17 percent of teachers—expect students in their courses to do six or more hours of homework weekly. The majority of high-school teachers—55 percent—expect students to do three to five hours of homework a week, while 28 percent expect zero to two hours. "Most of my students have a do-just-enough-to-get-by mentality," says an English teacher in Tennessee. "I don't assign homework because I will never get it back."

■ **When asked about reviewing material in class**, faculty members and teachers say that a lot of their time is spent going over work that students should have learned earlier. More than half the teachers and almost one-third of the faculty members spend more than 21 percent of class time doing that. A mathematics professor at a public university in Georgia complains that students "expect to forget what they learn—it's enough to just get the grade."

■ **When evaluating high-stakes tests**, both groups are uncertain about their impact and usefulness. Many states have turned to such exams to comply with

the federal No Child Left Behind law. But a plurality of faculty members, 45 percent, feel the tests have no impact on students' preparedness, while 29 percent say they have a slight or substantial positive impact, and 26 percent say they have a slight or substantial negative impact. Asked for their level of agreement with the statement that "high scores on the tests indicate that a student is well prepared for college," high-school teachers come down squarely in the middle, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

As to their views on whether SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement tests are reliable indicators of student readiness for college work, faculty members and teachers tend to agree that there is a relationship between test scores and student preparedness. Faculty members, however, are substantially less positive than the teachers that passing scores on AP tests signify that students can do college-level work. "I'd like to see advanced-placement courses eliminated," says an English professor at a private university in Colorado. "They foster a false sense of preparedness when they are not equivalent to college-level work."

■ **When asked whether they understand very well what's required for students to succeed in college**, more than two-thirds of the teachers say they do—even though only 11 percent say that colleges are very successful in making academic expectations clear to them. An even lower proportion of faculty members—5 percent—believe their institutions are very successful in making academic expectations clear to high-school teachers. Consistent with that, 37 percent of faculty members say that public secondary schools fail to adequately convey to students what colleges ex-

pect of them academically, and 60 percent say schools convey that information only somewhat well.

Over all, both teachers and faculty members agree on an urgent need for better communication and greater interaction among high schools and colleges.

"I think colleges need to start listening to high-school teachers more than just dictating what they expect from high-school students," says a professor in the sciences at a public university in Illinois.

An English teacher in Rhode Island says that "the only way we as teachers know what is going on in colleges across the state is when former students come back to visit us and tell of their experiences."

Both groups also offer ideas on how to improve the status quo. A mathematics teacher in California suggests developing a mentor program through which secondary-school students learn from undergraduates what will help them succeed academically in disciplines that interest them. An English professor at a public university in Massachusetts proposes that faculty members attend parent-teacher-association meetings in high schools to stress the importance of good writing and math skills, while an English teacher in California would like to see colleges offer writing seminars for high-school students.

Clearly, faculty members and teachers feel strongly about how well prepared today's students are for college. One indication: More than three-fourths of both groups took time to offer comments that go well beyond the questions asked in the surveys. Reflecting the views of a number of respondents, a science teacher in North Carolina says that, for students to be better prepared, "the entire education community needs to work together." ■